

Spare Rib review of Angelique Rockas' performance as Emma in the British premiere of Latin American playwright Griselda Gambaro's 'The Camp' performed by New Internationalist Theatre (later known as Internationalist Theatre) in London October 1981

"Angelique Rockas's performance as Emma is electric. So stunning ...."

## EL CAMPO

New Internationalist

Theatre

York and Albany,

London

Brilliant, terrifying, *El Campo* relentlessly exposes and explores the psychology of fascism. Immensely powerful, this is theatre that not so much suspends reality as sucks you into it. Griselda Gambaro is recognised as one of Argentina's greatest playwrights, but, according to Angelique Rockas, director of the New Internationalist Theatre which produced the play, British theatres have refused to touch *El Campo*, because it is too 'heavy'.

Set in a concentration camp, the play unfolds as a surrealistic nightmare. The camp itself is not specific. Through Emma, a woman haunted by the smell of the gas ovens, the camps of Nazi Germany are recalled. The peasants wailing outside the window evoke the camps of Gambaro's native Argentina, a country ruled by generals whose officers have pictures of Hitler in their torture chambers. It is a continuum of horror which extends into the sado-masochistic relation-

ship between Frank, the Camp Commandant, and Emma where the politics of male sexual fascism are laid bare and Martin, the visitor to the camp, who is played by a Black actor, effectively draws out the horrors of white racism.

Martin is an accountant, hired to do the books. Deliberately, self-protectively, he tries to blind himself to what he sees around him, refusing to make a stand. 'I'm here to do a job'. His refusal to confront Frank makes him his victim. To be systematically stripped of pride and dignity until he is literally wrapped in the white shrouds of the mummies: the blind, deaf and mute ghosts of fear who walk in and out of the play.

Emma is the camp's internee. To escape the horror she deludes herself that she is a great concert pianist, parodying the temperamental, elitist artist. Frank feeds her fantasies, smashes them at whim, until, at one point, it seems as if she has no identity but the one he gives her.

Within this dialectic lies Gambaro's savage indictment of the bourgeois artist, of his or her refusal to look at the world of exploitation and corruption which surrounds them.

Angelique Rockas's performance as Emma is electric. So stunning, it overshadowed the portrayal of Frank, whose character lacked the chilling edge of evil conveyed by his words, while Martin's gentle, hesitant playing seemed at times merely uncertain.

New Internationalist Theatre are hoping to produce the play again in 1982. Go and see it. It may be uncomfortable turning a laser-like perception on an aspect of life we would wish did not exist. But it does. And it's incredible theatre: a powerful alternative to the marshmallow media we usually get fed.

Jenny Vaughan

Spare Rib,

Ann Morey , BBC Latin American Service, 26 October 1981, broadcast review of Angelique Rockas` performance as Emma in the British premiere of Latin American playwright Griselda Gambaro`s `The Camp` (El Campo) performed by New Internationalist Theatre (later known as Internationalist Theatre), London

" En esta obra Emma representa al artista humillado y mutilado por la repression. Emma es en definitiva el grito primordial de Gambaro en esta impactante obra que ha capturado al public ingles. La actirz sudafricana , Angelique Rockas, encarna magistralmente el dificil papel de Emma."

Apenas es una situacion con sus implicancias de desenlace fatal.

Es siempre, en Griselda Gambaro, el juego entre los débiles y los fuertes. (Los débiles estan atrapados por el temor y por la necesidad de afecto. Los fuertes son inmisericordes como Frank.

A Martin lo destruye un mundo de terror y manipulacion psicologica al tratar de salvar a la ~~maxima~~ pianista victima-sobreviviente Emma, quien navega en la ambivalencia compartida y complice de Frank, en una intima relacion sado-mazoquista.

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La actirz sudafricana, Angelique Rockas, encarna magistralmente el difficil papel de Emma. Es ademas la fundadora del New International Theatre que con esta obra de Gambaro muestra que ~~en~~ el teatro absurdo le es posible atravesar todas las barreras regionales, nacionales y culturales que separan a los pueblos.

# BBC LATIN AMERICAN SERVICE

## THE CAMP

written and read by Ann Moxey (OC)

26 October 1981

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La semana pasada, en un teatro experimental de Londres llamado el nuevo teatro internacionalista, se estreno la obra "EL CAMPO" The Camp, de Griselda Gambaro, quizas la máxima representante del teatro absurdo argentino.) La obra se produjo por primera vez en Buenos Aires. Fue traducida al ingles por William Oliver y con ella hace ahora su espectral debut como director, Barry Phillips. El absurdo teatral, como se sabe, está vinculado con el movimiento surrealista, con la novelística de Kafka, con los horrores oníricos de Artaud, y con el dadnismo. Como dijo Mir a Arlt, el absurdo trata de conmover por la vía contraria de la reproducción de lo natural.) Su era el predominio de la emotividad en el roce estético, asociando contrasentidos, incongruencias, echando mano a diálogos insolitos, conclusiones inusitadas, monigotadas reide las puestas al servicio de una aterrante verdad subyacente. Es así como apela a los estratos mas profundos del espectador. El eje del teatro absurdo es siempre una falsedad. (En El Campo, Gambaro, quien reside actualmente en Paris, toma como eje la falsa situación del paradigma opresor-oprimido, dicotomía bien distinta del plano metafísico de un Beckett o del plano del habla de un Ionesco.) La dicotomía del opresor-oprimido de Gambaro no se expresa a traves de una historia verosimil, como lo haria el teatro tradicional. Lo hace a traves de un alto grado de abstracción y, utilizando elementos de nutrida connotación, forma la gran metáfora de la realidad paralela de la regresión. El espectador ingresa a esa meta-realidad por lo que hay en él de rasgos arcaicos, pero no identicos a su propia realidad. (En El Campo, Martín llega al establecimiento para ocupar su nuevo puesto de administrador, sin saber que el campo es de concentración.

Tom Vaughan of `The Morning Star` (29 October 1981 , Page 6) review of the performances in the British premiere of Latin American playwright Griselda Gambaro's `The Camp` (El Campo) performed by New Internationalist Theatre (later known as Internationalist Theatre), London .

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Morning Star  
plays and players  
by  
tom vaughan

**Searing**

**The Camp** (York and Albany, Camden Town).

MARTIN, spruce, self-confident and black, arrives at El Campo (in Spanish either "camp" or "country") to take up his new duties as "administrator." Strange noises outside attract his attention — running footsteps, dogs barking. Nothing is visible through the barred windows.)

He is eventually welcomed by Frank, jovial and apparently half-drunk, with a pile of papers to be sorted out. Frank wears nazi uniform; it is his whim, but he seems friendly enough. "Not armed, you see," he explains, but then asks two casually chilling questions. "Jew?" "Communist?"

So the humiliation and destruction of Martin commences, to culminate in his branding and symbolic castration at curtain-fall.

Griselda Gambaro has written this searing play from her own experiences in fascist Argentine.

It is presented by the New Internationalist Theatre and acted with great power by Roy Lee as Martin, Richard Trent as Frank, and above all Angelique Rockas, a South African, as Emma, the already destroyed person, hysterical and half-mad whom Frank uses as jail-bait to "get" Martin.

ANGÉLIQUE ROCKAS AS EMMA.

